

One Police Plaza

The Schoolcraft Problems

November 12, 2012

Whistle-blower cop Adrian Schoolcraft and his father Larry want to bring the world down. In the process, their supporters fear they are losing focus and hurting themselves.

Last Saturday, Larry Schoolcraft called this reporter to say that Adrian — who came to prominence after police forcibly took him from his apartment to Jamaica Hospital, where he was held in a psychiatric ward for six days against his will — has fired the lawyer who has represented Adrian since the hospital incident.

“He doesn’t tell us anything. He makes deals behind our backs,” Larry Schoolcraft, said of Manhattan attorney Jon Norinsberg, who has represented Adrian since 2010 and filed a \$50 million federal lawsuit against the city. “We need a leader. We need an architect.”

Norinsberg said: “The father wants us to go after Kelly [Police Commissioner Ray Kelly], Bloomberg [Mayor Michael Bloomberg], the FBI, everyone under the sun. We’ve had a complete communications breakdown.

“This comes completely out of the blue. Adrian has stayed in my house and we’ve never had a bad word. Until I hear otherwise from Adrian, I’m still representing him.”

Norinsberg added that the Schoolcrafts’ behavior has become increasingly bizarre. “They have disappeared three times in the last six months. We literally had to have [Frank] Serpico involved to track them down.”

Norinsberg has handled the case in the traditional legal manner — through the courts, a process that can take years, even decades, to resolve.

Norinsberg’s lawsuit charges that Adrian’s forced hospitalization was NYPD retaliation for his allegations that supervisors at the 81st precinct in Brooklyn, where he worked, ordered cops to downgrade crime statistics from felonies to misdemeanors so that city would appear safer than it actually was.

Hospitalizing him, the suit alleges, was part of an NYPD plan to harass, intimidate him, and make him appear unstable to undercut his allegations.

The NYPD subsequently confirmed Adrian’s allegations: specifically that commanders in the 81st precinct did doctor crime statistics. The department has transferred and/or brought departmental charges against five 81st precinct supervisors, including the precinct’s commanding officer, a deputy Inspector.

Meanwhile criminologists John Eterno and Eli Silverman have alleged that downgrading of crimes is not confined to the 81st precinct but is city-wide, an allegation first made by the heads of the heads of the Patrolmen’s and Sergeants’ unions five years before.

Amidst a growing furor, Kelly, in January 2011, announced the appointment of three former federal prosecutors to serve as members of a Crime Reporting Review Committee.

“The integrity of our crime reporting system is of the utmost importance to the Department,” Kelly said in a well-publicized department news release. “It is essential not only for maintaining the confidence of the people we serve, but reliable crime statistics are necessary for the effective planning and evaluation of crime reduction strategies. “

Kelly said the committee would complete its work over the next three to six months.

That was nearly two years ago. The department has yet to release any crime commission statement or report. Nor has Kelly responded to questions about the report or explained the reasons for the delay. Deputy Commissioner Paul Browne did not respond to an email on the matter from *NYPD Confidential* over the weekend.

Nor has Kelly explained why police officers forced Schoolcraft from his home and took him to Jamaica hospital.

Meanwhile, other Schoolcraft allies have expressed concerns that the Schoolcrafts may be alienating the very people they need to hold the police department accountable for their actions against Adrian and the issues his case has raised.

Nobody denies that whistleblowers can be difficult. Anyone who singlehandedly takes on a gigantic organization like the NYPD, as Adrian has, comes under tremendous psychological and emotional pressures.

Father and son have left the city and moved upstate. Larry Schoolcraft said they feared for their safety in New York. They now have no income. They live in a house with four dogs, a cat and an electric heater. People in contact with them say they are sometimes at odds with each other.

Serpico — who in the early 1970s exposed the department's pervasive and systemic corruption and who since has become an iconic figure and inspiration for people like Adrian — said in a telephone interview: "The department wants to undermine all that they stand for by painting them as malcontents, nuts, psychos. The danger for Adrian is that his message may be lost and the department let off the hook."

That is exactly the situation Serpico faced 42 years ago. Former *New York Times* city editor Arthur Gelb recently wrote in the *Times* that then Mayor John Lindsay had called the *Times's* publisher then, urging the *Times* to ignore Serpico's allegations against the police department and calling him "bizarre." The *Times's* police bureau chief, David Burnham, knew better. The *Times's* reporting of Serpico's claims on its front page led Lindsay to appoint the Knapp Commission on police corruption. As a result, the NYPD's systemic and pervasive corruption was ended. Corruption, of course, still exists, but on a far smaller scale.

Larry Schoolcraft says he and Adrian want a more media-driven, public airing than is now occurring.

Last week Larry called to say that Adrian was preparing to replace Norinsberg with attorneys from the New York Civil Liberties Union. Chris Dunn, the NYCLU's Associate Legal Director declined comment.

Larry Schoolcraft added that he had arranged a meeting with NYCLU attorneys, a reporter from the *Village Voice*, another from the *Times* and the *Times's* general counsel.

A person familiar with that claim said, "Larry tried to set up a meeting like that a month or so ago. Nobody was interested."

EXPLOITING THE DEAD. Leave it to politicians and public officials to plug themselves and their causes, even at a funeral.

Speaking at the funeral of police officer Artur Kasprzak, who was electrocuted in his home while saving his family during Hurricane Sandy, Police Commissioner Kelly stated that Kasprzak had been "fighting terrorism" — a cause nearest and dearest to Kelly.

For all Kasprzak's virtues, he was a beat cop in the First Precinct, who was fighting street crime, not terrorism.

Meanwhile Mayor Bloomberg, who, like Kelly, invited himself to the funeral, said of Kasprzak: "Officers like him are the reason this is the safest big city in America."

That claim of being the safest big city is nearest and dearest to Bloomberg. The fact that it is totally and irrevocably false hasn't stopped Mayor Mike from trumpeting it any chance he gets.

Poor Mayor Mike. Hurricane Sandy seems not only to have demoralized but to have unhinged him.

Besides telling President Obama to stay away from New York and making himself appear an insensitive clod over the New York City Marathon, he is now having trouble getting his lines right.

His press office put out as Bloomberg's "as prepared" remarks, this closing line from his eulogy of Kasprzak: "May God bless Artur Kasprzak and everyone he loved. And may God bless and protect the NYPD."

Either someone switched the words of the speech in front of him or Mayor Mike misread them because what he actually said was: "And may God bless and protect the FDNY."

EMENDATION: This column of Oct. 29 reported incorrectly that, after Kelly returned as Police Commissioner in 2002, he sabotaged former First Deputy Joe Dunne's attempt to land a top law enforcement position with the administration of Gov. Andrew Cuomo. It was with the administration of then Attorney General Cuomo.

Edited by Donald Forst

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